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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 000170

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [KPAL](#) [KWBG](#) [UN](#) [US](#)
SUBJECT: NEW UNSCO FOCUSED ON UN/ISRAELI RELATIONS AND GAZA

Classified By: Ambassador Richard H. Jones, reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: On January 14, Ambassador Jones and EconCouns met with Robert Serry, the new UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process (UNSCO). Mr. Serry is also the UN's representative to the Palestinians and the UN Quartet envoy. During the meeting, the Ambassador updated Mr. Serry on how the missions of the three generals-- General Jones, General Fraser, and General Dayton-- are supporting negotiations, and gave a readout on the recent visit of President Bush. Serry said that he would like to see the UN take a more serious role in supporting U.S. efforts and is focusing on improving UN/Israeli relations as a first step. Mr. Serry also emphasized that Gaza is a top priority for the UN Secretary-General (SYG) both as a threat to peace and because of the deteriorating humanitarian situation. He said the UN supports Palestinian PM Fayyad's plan to reopen the Karni crossing and has identified both financial and logistical support to move the plan forward.
END SUMMARY.

POTUS Pushes Peace, UN Wants to Help

¶2. (C) Ambassador Jones told Serry that during his visit, President Bush was able to successfully "nudge" the negotiations forward, while demonstrating his seriousness and direct involvement. The Ambassador also underlined that the trip was a success before it began because it helped spark the opening of talks on core issues.

¶3. (C) The Ambassador explained that Israeli actions like ongoing settlement activity are a problem, but pointed out that the process is designed to withstand this pressure by holding the talks in parallel to work on Roadmap implementation. It's also possible that progress on the negotiations could facilitate Roadmap implementation. For example, once the final border is decided, it will be absolutely clear where Israel can build and where it must evacuate. It is more difficult to determine how the final report of the Winograd Commission, due January 30, will affect the negotiations. Serry agreed and said it would be difficult if PM Olmert were replaced, especially since he had been hearing from many Palestinian officials that they are starting to trust Olmert.

¶4. (C) The Ambassador then described the different missions of General Jim Jones, General William Fraser, and General Keith Dayton. Jones, he explained, will be involved in strategic planning for security issues. Dayton, on the other hand, will continue his focus on immediate needs of the Palestinians for security training and equipment. General Fraser's monitoring mission will be looking at what the sides are actually doing to honor their respective commitments.

¶5. (C) Serry added that the UN could do more to help support U.S. efforts, especially considering its extensive presence

in the West Bank and Gaza. He admitted that one obstacle to the UN being a more serious player is the relationship between Israel and the UN, which he hoped to address. Following his initial visit to Gaza in a few days, Serry said he would also visit Sderot to show sympathy for the Israeli situation. Serry had already told FM Livni that the UN would be more open and transparent in its dealings with the GOI and, when possible, make sure they are not surprised. The Ambassador encouraged Serry to work on improving the relationship, applauding the trip to Sderot and adding that the Israelis always respond well when you acknowledge their security concerns. EconCouns added that OCHA previously had a good dialogue with the IDF on verifying checkpoints, and he recommended Serry look at restarting those discussions.

Gaza Deteriorating; Hamas Becoming More Dangerous

¶6. (C) Serry said that when he was sent on this mission, the UN SYG emphasized that Gaza is one of his top priorities. Gaza needs crisis management, and UN people on the ground indicate that the risk of it becoming a humanitarian crisis remains high. If something happened to prevent UN from operating there, Serry underscored, it would turn into a serious disaster very quickly.

¶7. (C) In the meantime, Serry said, Hamas has the ability to spoil the peace process, and there doesn't seem to be a real game plan to deal with them. UN sources in Gaza report that Hamas is both consolidating power and splintering internally, creating a very dangerous situation. The Egyptian Embassy told Serry that they are prioritizing negotiating a ceasefire between Hamas and Israel. The Ambassador agreed that Hamas

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remains dangerous, adding that we believe Gaza will be easier to bring back into the fold once there is an agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA). However, there will be no implementation on an agreement until rocket attacks cease and Gaza is back under PA security control.

Opening Karni Crossing May Help

¶8. (C) The UN is encouraging the reopening of Karni crossing under PA control to both help the people of Gaza and to assist the PA in reasserting itself. The UN supports Fayyad's plan to run the Gaza side of the crossing, and has identified both funding, from the Dutch, and training by UNOPS to make it happen. This would put the onus of the siege on Hamas, Serry said, and challenge their authority. The Ambassador added that a large source of Hamas income comes from taxing everyday items like cigarettes that are being smuggled in, which could be reduced through the use of legitimate trade channels. The Ambassador told Serry that we have encouraged the MOD and GOI to consider Fayyad's proposal and find ways to address their concerns. For example, PA customs officials could commute to Karni from the West Bank, which would ease Israeli concerns about Hamas intimidation.

Bio Note

¶10. (C) Robert H. Serry is a career diplomat from the Netherlands, most recently serving as Ambassador to Ireland. He has headed the Middle East Affairs Division of the Dutch Foreign Ministry (A/S NEA equivalent) and was previously the Deputy Assistant Secretary-General for Crisis Management and Operations at NATO. His mission officially began on January 1, and he arrived on January 8. He was appointed by the SYG on November 29, 2007, replacing Michael Williams, who departed last August.

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